Mesopotamia ܡܫܘܦܛܡܝܐ

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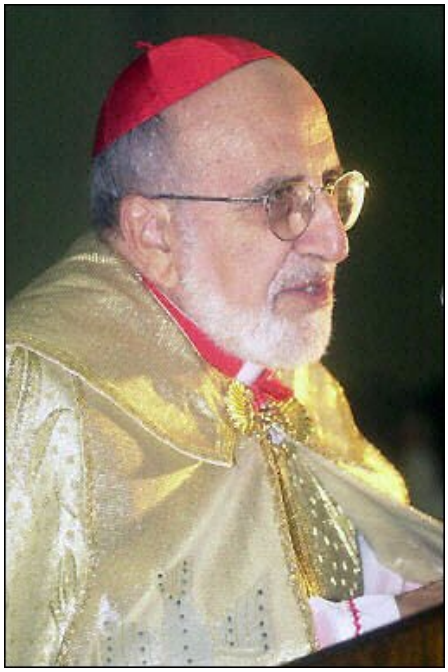
Chaldean Patriarch: Christians persecuted by Iraqi government and foreign troops

the leader of the Chaldean Church has gathered and echoed appeals by bishops and clergy, calling for a stop to "internal and external persecution" that is affecting Christians in Iraq. He urged politicians not to stand by and watch, and also condemned US troops: "God does not appreciate what you are doing in our country."



Erbil (AsiaNews) – The Patriarch for the Chaldeans, Emmanuel III Delly, has come out with a strong accusation against the Iraqi authorities and foreign troops and has called for decisive intervention from the government and international community to stop the haemorrhage of persecuted Christians from Iraq. Shortly after returning from a long stay in the United States, the head of the Chaldean Church denounced, for the first time since the beginning of the war, the sins of politicians and armies against the people, emphasizing the worrying conditions that Christians are in, threatened with extinction. "Christians are killed, chased out of their homes before the very eyes of those who are supposed to be responsible for their safety," Delly said forcefully from the altar of the church of Mar Qardagh in Erbil, Kurdistan, where he celebrated Mass on 6 May. The persecution campaign undertaken by Muslim extremists in big cities as well as in villages has prompted the Iraqi clergy and bishops to make several appeals in recent months for the unity of the country and the rights of their community, which has always been a fundamental part of Iraqi society.

Delly gathered these appeals and made them once again in loud voice: "Today, Christians are persecuted in a country where everyone is fighting for their own personal interests. They have always lived in Iraq and over the years they have done everything possible to contribute to its development together with their Muslim brothers." Delly said Christians would surely fight to ensure respect for their rights as Iraqis on regional level as well as that of the central government.

In his address, reported in Arabic on the internet site of the Patriarchate of Baghdad http://www.st-adday.com/, he described the two-fold nature of the persecution: internal and external. "Internal persecution is that perpetrated by Iraqis themselves, who are chasing Christians out of their homes and lands. Responsible for this persecution are all those in power who did nothing and are doing nothing to stop this tragedy. External persecution is that which has affected the very dignity of all the Iraqi people, whose mosques, churches and institutions have been destroyed or occupied, without any respect for their faith." In this regard, the Patriarch recalled the case of Babel College; its former base in Baghdad has been transformed by American troops into a military base against the wishes of the Patriarchate. This could be seen as further proof that shared faith does not imply complicity between the foreign troops and the Christian community, victimized by the war as much as Muslims are.

As for the United States, Delly had hard words for its intervention: "The Americans came to Iraq without our consent. God does not appreciate what you have done and are doing in our country... Let us hope that the Lord enlightens these people so that they may stop violating the rights of all Iraqis."

The strong stand taken by the Patriarchate, which has kept a low profile for all these years, was expected by the community that now feels somewhat more hopeful. "Now we can even die but at least we will do so knowing that we are doing something, not just waiting for our community to flee from the country or to disappear," said a priest cited by the website Baghdadhope.

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“the Church in Iraq is in great danger”

The latest attacks in the North, until now the safest area in the country, sound the alarm. Msgr Rabban Al Qas "begs" the Vatican: “Intervene, Christians are now in ranger everywhere”. The death toll from a suicide bombing of Tell-el-skop: 10 dead, among the 140 wounded two Dominican nuns. In Baghdad, the ongoing” massacre” of Christians and Shiites in the Dora quarter.

Erbil (AsiaNews) – There are numerous children and Dominican nuns among the wounded from suicide bombing of the Christian village of Tell-el-skop, north east of Mosul. Suicide attacks targeting the North of the country have sounded the alarm for religious leaders, who now ask the Holy See for help. “Find a way, a means to save us, the Church in all of Iraq is in great danger, we beg the Vatican to help us bring our voice to the world”. It almost seems like an ultimatum, these words expressed by Msgr. Rabban al Qas, Chaldean bishop of Amadiyah and Erbil, in his reiteration of the Iraqi Catholic Churches appeal launched yesterday through AsiaNews following the increasingly ferocious nature of attacks carried out against Christians in the country.

The bishop speaks from Kurdistan, upon till now an oasis of calm where Iraq’s Christians could find refuge. He speaks of the “frightening situation” for the community in big cities and in the small villages. They attack on Tell-el-skop, where a car bomb was exploded closet o the head quarters of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, the Kurdish political party lead by Massoud Balzani, was not the first such attack. The explosion seriously damaged the nearby Dominican

Convent and primary school and kindergarten which the sisters run. At least 10 people were killed among them two children; among the 140 wounded there are two religious. A sister present at the time of the blast said the explosion terrorized the little ones, who up on till now had never witnessed such violence in their village.

According to local catholic sources the spreading attacks on the north have confessional origins: “they want to attack Christians and religious minorities to prove that there is neither security plan, nor protection barrier that the USA can build capable of protecting them”. Political-economic motivations are neither excluded: “We will target Kurds along with Christians, whose demands on Kirkuk’s oil reserves are intolerable to many groups both in Iraq and abroad” add the sources.

Either ways the areas suffering the most at the moment remain Baghdad and Mosul. Church sources in Baghdad confirm that the “massacre” in the Dora quarter, where armed Sunni groups kill Shiites and impose conversion or exile on the Christians, continues unabated. Even Christians hopeful of a free and peaceful Iraq now speak of “a country without hope, for at least a further ten years”.

“Get rid of the cross or we will burn your Churches”.

In the Dora quarter threats continue to be made against Christians. In the last two months Christian parishes have been forced to give in to extremist pressure, only the Church of Sts Peter and Paul has withstood so far. A fatwa forbids the practice of Christian ritual gestures. The US army occupies Babel College, property of the Chaldean Patriarchate.

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Baghdad (AsiaNews) – "Get rid of the cross or we will burn your Churches". This is the threat aimed at the Chaldean Church of Sts Peter and Paul, located in the ancient Christian quarter of Baghdad, Dora. Local sources say an unknown armed Islamic group is behind the threats which are inseminating terror in the capital. The Arab website *Ankawa.com* and Aina news agency speak of a campaign of persecution in act in the area. Even Mosul, a Sunni stronghold, the Christian presence is being gravely threatened.

Msgr. Shlemon Warduni, Chaldean auxiliary bishop of Baghdad,

tells *AsiaNews* "in the last 2 months many Churches have been forced to remove their crosses from their domes". In the case of the Church of St. George, assira, Muslim extremists took the situation into their own hands: they climbed onto the roof and ripped out the cross. In the Chaldean Church of St John, in Dora, which has been without a pastor for months now, the parishioners themselves decided to move the cross to a safer place following repeated threats.

The same threats which have arrived at the Church of Sts Peter and Paul, which has so far however withstood intimidation: the cross hasn't been removed but the threats continue. "The Iraqi people are tired – says Warduni – we have been suffering for far too long the situation has become unsustainable; we ask God to give us peace. The Christians, just like the Muslims, want to rebuild Iraq, we don't want to be forced to flee, because this is where we were born, this is where we have lived our lives".

The Islamic group active in Dora seems to have delivered an ultimatum to the Christian community there: convert to Islam or die; moreover reports say that they have delivered a Fatwa forbidding Christians to wear the cross or make any religious gesture. It also permits the confiscation of goods and properties belonging to the Christian families who find themselves forced to flee their homes for safety at short notice

Post-Mesopotamian History (Pre-Christian Era)

By Farid Oufi

Mesopotamia is a Greek word for "the land between two rivers", the Euphrates and Tigris which have their sources in Turkey. But this land is known by its present name Iraq for more than 15 centuries or at least since the Arab Muslim army entered it in 634 AD. The name Iraq is derived from the Akkadian word "Aurok". The Arab army called it "Iraqan" i.e. two Iraqis to distinguish two identities. The Arab Iraq and al-Ajami (the Persian) Iraq. Mesopotamia, as it was measured by its fertile land, represented about 20-25000 square kilometers of irrigated land. On this territory there assembled an unprecedented concentration of people and resources. Lower Mesopotamia did indeed become "the garden of Eden", where waves of immigrants came to settle and where there was an abundance of cereals, fruit trees and sesame (a source of cooking oil) and that of course the marvel trees, date-palms. The centre of gravity of Mesopotamia moved south as a result. While civilization had originally come from the north, now it would be located entirely in the south, and all those fragile early centres would be wiped out, swept away by the sheer might of the massive civilization of the lower valley, triumphant and expansionist.[i]

Mesopotamian civilization is the worlds earliest, dating from about 3500 BC. But who are the Mesopotamians who built that civilization and are they the ancestors of the people involved in the Iraqi church?

BABEL

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HAMMURABI

Historians give different hypothesis. One says that the Chaldeans are Semitic people originating in Arabia. In their migration, they followed the eastern route northward and struck root in the Tigris-Euphrates valley and settled in what became Chaldia in 800 BC and ruled Babylonia in 625-539 BC. The term Chaldean was from that time also used to denote Babylonia until well into the Hellenic period. Another theory says they were, along with the Assyrians, among the group of people speaking a western Semitic language (Aramaic), originally tribal pastoralists. In the middle of the second millennium BC they formed small states in Syria and northern Mesopotamia. Later, Aramaic became the most widely spoken and understood language in western Asia. Written Aramaic, using different types of alphabetic scripts, first appeared around 800 BC and came to be known by the name of Syriac shortly before the Christian era. After Greek, it was the most important language in the Eastern Roman Empire until the rise of Islam in the 8th century when it was absorbed by Arabic. The Assyrians originally centered on Ashur, a city state on the west bank of the Tigris river which became prominent and expanded its borders to become a kingdom. They preceded their kinships, the Chaldeans, in creating an empire which stretched from Mesopotamia to Egypt in the 7th century BC. Nineveh (near Mosul of today) was their capital and along with the Babylon of the Chaldeans witnessed the sunset of the Mesopotamian civilization.

(To be continued)

The hard days

By Fr. Habib JAJOU

Whenever I meet refugees in Europe I feel how much they have suffered to settle here. And whenever I ask him/her to write me something about his journey, he does apologies. I think they have right for that, because it is not easy for him to write words expressing their suffering.

But this does not mean stop writing about history of our people. It is necessary to write for the new generation and to the world about the reality of suffering in Iraq; the suffering of the Iraqi Church which pain silently, while the world do not care about that.

The church of Iraq unfortunately has a good relationship with words such as: the Cross, painful, persecution, fear, obedience without debate, terrorism, slaughter, murder, displacement, theft, threats, robbery, degradation, coercion, migration, escape, injustice, abuse, silence, bias.

Tens of thousands of Iraqi Christians have sacrificed their lives in endless wars. Tens of thousands of families displaced from village to village, and from town to town in implementation of the wishes of the great Leviathans; Bones of thousands of Christians have been crushed of in a closed rooms accommodate their thirst and hunger; Priests, nuns, monks, innocent children, and young girls have slaughtered because they have loved Jesus Christ! Thousands of engineers, doctors and leadership positions of our teachers have been dispossessed,

They were able to lead a whole country towards glory, but they could not because they are Christian. Our children feel fear of sudden attacks in the backyard because their parents are peaceful Christians accepting attacking people without resistance, rather they hand them all they have.

So, had we a human right? How many families received a threatening letter in the early morning, and bore the campaign eased portable, and backs gone?

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How many girls went shopping was hijacked and their lives have been destroyed? How many merchants do dearly to build projects quickly turned into Ruins? And even the ruins have removed. Even brick project uprooted from the walls.
How many of us hear the pain ridiculous words because we have Christian names, or surnames. We wished we were not born there so as not so insulted.
How many fugitives have been robed by bandits even to his car before entering Jordan or Syria?

Faithful people were saving pennies to build a church or monastery. Today collapse churches and monasteries are abandoned. Perhaps some will say that the presently condition is the same with that across history where hundreds of monasteries and churches have been destroyed such as that in Kufa, Kut, Anbar, Missan, Basra, Samarra, Ahwaz; Baghdad and Tikrit?

It is difficult for some country like Iraq to be empty of Christians, but what did our insister Abraham? Why he when Ur was spoiled? Is this an escape from a reality like Hell or shaking shoes of dust as Jesus said to his disciples?

It is necessary to write our memory, which finally is the nation history, people refuse dying, rather adore life.

In this memory, we will read about the big suffering: fear, hungry, thirsty, horror, climbing mountains, crossing reveres, children's crying, hot tears and prayers, farewell lovely people, remaining in Jesus and Christian values, being honest to God, adventures stories, finally different things that form the immortality of national wisdom.

Two stars of Syriac spirituality:

Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha

Dr. Sebastian Brock

The seventh to ninth centuries witnessed a truly remarkable flowering of literature in Syriac on the spiritual life. The authors were monks and solitaries of the Church of the East. Through translations into Arabic and Greek some of them have proved to be very influential outside the Church of the East (this applies above all to Isaac of Nineveh, the First Part of whose writings has been translated into many different languages).

These writers were heirs to earlier literature on the spiritual life, produced in both Greek and Syriac over the fourth to sixth century; two earlier authors were particularly influential, Evagrius of Pontus (died 399), who wrote in Greek but was readily available in Syriac translation, and John the Solitary (also known as John of Apamea), who lived in Syria in the early part of the fifth century and wrote in Syriac.

Isaac of Nineveh was born in the region of Qatar, but came to north Mesopotamia where he was bishop of Nineveh (that is, Mosul) for a short period, before retiring to the mountains of Khuzistan, where he spent the rest of his life as a hermit, attached to the monastery of Rabban Shabur. The dates of his birth and death are not known, but his lifetime will have spanned roughly the second half of the seventh century. His writings come down to us in three parts, of which the second and third have only come to light in recent years. Before that, only the First Part was known; the original Syriac text consists of 86 discourses on the spiritual life, of varying length. It had been thought that the only manuscript of the Second Part had been destroyed in Urmia in the First World War, but in the mid 198.s another manuscript

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was identified in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Even more recently, a manuscript with the Third Part has turned up in Tehran, belonging to the late Chaldean bishop of Tehran. Translations of these new works are gradually appearing.

Although his teaching was primarily intended for monks, much of it is equally relevant for lay people, and its wide appeal can be judged from the considerable number of translations into many different languages that have been published in recent years.

John of Dalyatha, who is also known as John the Elder (or just 'the spiritual Sheikh'), belongs to the eighth century. Virtually nothing is known of his life, except that he was a monk of the monastery of Dalyatha ('vine shoots'), situated somewhere in northern Mesopotamia. He is the author of 51 short spiritual letters and 22 discourses on the spiritual life. So far only the Letters have been published and translated; these are remarkable for their great fervour.

Isaac of Nineveh and John of Dalyatha were by no means the only great writers of the 7th and 8th century on the spiritual life: other authors who have left writings that are still well worth reading today include:

- Sahdona (also known by the Greek form of his name, Martyrius), author of The Book of Perfection. Early seventh century.
- Simeon of the Book of Grace. Late seventh century.
- Joseph Hazzaya ('the Seer'). Eighth century.

Saint Isaac Spiritual Discourses, 2nd Series, no. 10,36: **"Jesus turned toward them… to reprimand them."**

Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke 9,51-56.

When the disciples James and John saw this they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to consume them?" Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they journeyed to another village.

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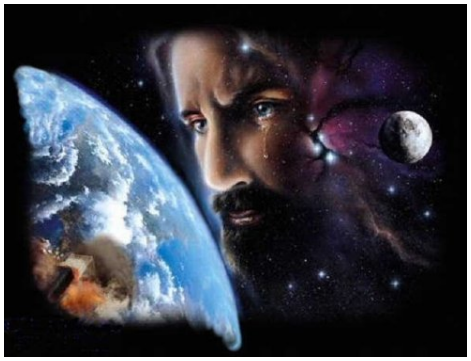
When someone has been made worthy to taste God's love, he usually forgets everything because of its sweetness, for once he has tasted that love, everything visible seems to him to be of no interest. His soul joyfully draws near to the beautiful love of people without distinction. He is never troubled by their weaknesses, which do not frighten him, just like the blessed apostles who, in the midst of all the evils which they had to bear from their torturers, were completely incapable of hating them and did not tire of loving them. This was shown by facts when, in the end, they even bore death so as to meet them again one day in heaven.

And yet, they were the same people who a little earlier had begged Christ to make fire come down from heaven on the Samaritans, who had only refused to welcome them in their village. But once they had received the gift of tasting God's love, they were made perfect even to the point of loving the wicked.



A Prayer in Troubled Times

Psalm 57

Have mercy on me, God, have mercy on me. In you I seek shelter.
In the shadow of your wings [3] I seek shelter till harm pass by.
I call to God Most High, to God who provides for me.
May God send help from heaven to save me, shame those who trample upon me. May God send fidelity and love.
I must lie down in the midst of lions hungry for human prey. Their teeth are spears and arrows; their tongue, a sharpened sword.
Show yourself over the heavens, God; may your glory appear above all the earth.
They have set a trap for my feet; my soul is bowed down; They have dug a pit before me. May they fall into it themselves! Selah
My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and chant praise.
Awake, my soul; awake, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn.
I will praise you among the peoples, Lord; I will chant your praise among the nations.
For your love towers to the heavens; your faithfulness, to the skies.
Show yourself over the heavens, God; may your glory appear above all the

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The Occupation of al-Ruha

By Archbishop Bar Hebraeus

Translated from Aramaic Lang. by Fr Habib JAJOU

Introduction

Archbishop Gregorios Bar Hebraeus Abu Faraj Almlati was born in 1226AD in Multea / Mesopotamia, died in 1286AD and buried in the monastery of Mar Matta near Mosul/Iraq. According to Dr Suha Rassam, "Bar Hebraeus is probably the most outstanding figure of the -Easter Orthodox church- The son of a physician who, after studying medicine in Antioch and Tripoli, turned to theological studies and the priesthood. He was consecrated bishop and became primate of the Syrian Orthodox Church in 1264AD. His works are encyclopaedic in character and were mainly written in Syriac, though a few were written in Arabic. They cover a wide field of subjects including theology, philosophy history, sciences and monasticism."[1]

Below is a translation of his article about Turks troops seizing al-Ruha (Christian city south of Turkey). This article was published in Mosul/Iraq in 1901 by bishop Yacob Eugene Manna in Volume II titled: Collection of Aramaic Literature; Chapter II, Part **XXVI, p. 361-365.**

The translated text

In 1144, The Governor of Mosul-Zinky, decided to launch an attack on al-Ruha, as he was informed by the people of al-Harran, that Joselyne, the governor, Thus, al-Ruha became vulnerable and easy to occupy.

On Tue., 28th of Nov 1144, Commander Zinky besieged al-Ruha, and started hitting its military camps, near the Church of Confessors in Bab al-Sa'at (The gate of Watches).
He set up seven Mangenikat (like missiles today), and hailed the city with burning arrows, like rain.

People of al-Ruha, young, old, men, women, and children, defended their city, as well as monks, up in the mountains. Women were handing food, stones and water to the warriors, who climbed the walls that surround the city, to fight the invaders.

Zinky's men, managed to dig a tunnel to reach the wall, and two other towers. Al-Ruha's people, also managed to dig a tunnel, to get out and killed as many as they could, on their way out.

As the two towers were near to fall, al-Atabak Zinky sent a letter to al-Ruha people, warning them of the consequences: saying," Take two men from us, and send us two men to see the danger of the about to fall towers ", threatening them, to perish the city, if they refuse to surrender.

But Papias, the western governor, refused to do so, as he was relying on Jocelyn, and the king of Jerusalem, to rescue him.

Simultaneously, the Turkish army, tried to exploit a gap, and inter the city from the other side. As the people and all the priests, rushed to defend that side, they left the walls of the city, unguarded Turkish army, climbed the walls, and intered the city.

The hundreds of people killed in this action, is nothing compared to the massacres that followed. Turkish invaders started chasing everyone. The weak, unarmed, horrified people, fleeing for their life to the fortress in the town centre, they spared no one.

No one can describe that crime that occurred on Sat. the 3rd of Jan, at 3 a.m. The Turks entered the city, with their swords high over the heads of the innocent, elderly, children, men, women, priests and infants, to drink their blood. What a bitter story, the Abger city (the first king who believed in Jesus in the first century) was crushed because of our sins and bad deeds!

When the priests and senators, who were carrying the coffins saw the anger that the prophet said about: " *I console the anger of the Lord, because I have sinned.*" Did not flee or stopped praying, until they were s
Their bodi

[1] Christianity in Iraq by Dr Suha Rassam, London, 2005 p. 71.

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blood. Mothers gathered their children around them like – mother Hen and her chicks – waiting either to be slaughtered by the sword or to be taken as slaves.

For those who fled to the fortress, the guards refused to open for them unless they see Papias. But he was not able to come in first, so thousands have asphyxiated because of congestion, and when Papias came, he was not able to entre because of the piles of bodies in front of the door of the fortress. He was shot by Turks and died.

When Zinky saw that horror, he stopped the killing. Bishop Basilios was seen naked and barefoot. He was pulled by Turks with a rope. When Zinky saw him, he recognised him through the sobriety of his personality. He asked about his identity. And when he learned that he is the Archbishop; he ordered his men to cloth him and let him in his tent.

Zinky started blaming bishop Basilios for refusing to surrender and saved his people, Bishop replied: *'Divine Providence wants you have this power and you've been the big winner among your friends and kings, and us poor have uncovered faces toward the Lord that do not go beyond our creed'*.

Zinky admired the Archbishop's answer, and said *"you are right, bishop. Those who endure, and honour their vows to god and their fellow mankind, till death, are the most respectable ones."*

As to those, who were in the fortress, the Turks had promised to spare them, if they surrendered, and they did. But the Turks kept killing the Byzantines where ever they found them. So our people, and the Armenian, survived this horrible massacre.

We can not tell the story of this strike, but we return to the prophet Jeremiah and like to call the laments to write poetries about the compassionated people.

PLEAS FOR IRAQI CHRISTIANS

1. **We hope for a real democracy in Iraq, with a parliament to represent people of all different ethnics and religious backgrounds.**
2. **Christians aim to gain all their religions rights and practices, and to have a freedom of thought and conscience.**
3. **We wish to have all rights articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International covenant on Civil and Political Rights**
4. **We urge Iraqi Parliament to practice disassociation between religion and the state implement and institutional guarantees of freedom for all religion.**
5. **Provide a protection to all Christian's places of worship, schools, and convents.**
6. **Religious leaders should speak out frankly against violence targeting Christians.**
7. **Iraqis should be educated and made aware of respecting inter-culture and inter-faith cooperation.**
8. **Putting a contingency plan to help Christians refugees in Jordan and Syria, those who are in north of Iraq and those who are stranded in other parts of the world.**

[i] Fernand Braudel's "Mesopotamia in Ancient World" - pp 65-66

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